



# **Working with Neurodivergent Artists**

**A Neuk Collective Guide for  
Cultural Organisations**

This guide, along with many other resources, is  
freely available on our website,  
**[www.neukcollective.co.uk](http://www.neukcollective.co.uk)**

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## **Introduction**

It is estimated that 1 in every 7 people in the UK are neurodivergent – meaning that our brains process the world differently from what is often considered “the norm”. Conditions included under the neurodiversity umbrella include ADD/ADHD, autism/aspergers, bipolar, chronic anxiety or depression, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia, epilepsy, OCD, PTSD or Tourettes.

Neurodivergent people expend a lot of energy “masking” to fit in, and we are often exhausted by the constant need to adapt to a neurotypical world. Many organisations want to better support neurodivergent artists but are unsure about where to start. This guide is a non-exhaustive list of ways your team could improve accessibility for neurodivergent artists who apply for your opportunities, or work with you as freelancers employees, or exhibiting artists.

## **Why should my organisation support neurodivergent artists?**

Cultural organisations need to do more to support ND artists because

- Right now ND artists can't fit into the current system's boxes and so, many talented artists are not seen or considered in current programming and events

- ND artists bring a fresh perspective on the world that needs to be shared
- It's the right thing to do
- It's the law! Under the Equality Act, employers (and other businesses and organisations) are required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

We emphasise that this document may give a distorted view of neurodivergent people because it dwells on our challenges and difficulties rather than our talents and strengths. Neurodivergent people have much to offer. With simple adjustments and considerations you can support ND artists, remove barriers and work inclusively.

## **Issues to Consider**

Although every neurodivergent person is different, there are some broad issues to consider. It is unlikely that anyone will need all of these adjustments, but they may need some – the key thing is to ask the artists themselves.

## **Everyone is an Individual**

There is a huge diversity of conditions under the umbrella of neurodiversity each bringing different challenges.. Even when two people share the same diagnosis on paper, their access requirements will be individual. Always treat artists as individuals. Ask them about what adjustments they need.

Access riders are a helpful way for artists to communicate their individual access needs to organisations. Riders come in various forms, but broadly they are lists of an individual's access needs for a good working environment and can give other information the artist thinks the organisation should know. A few examples of things that a neurodivergent artist might have in their rider

- Their communication preferences – e.g. if the artist prefers email or phone
- If they have a support worker or PA that will come to meetings or events with them
- If they need to use a recorder instead of taking notes
- If they need rest breaks or a flexible working pattern

Make clear during the application process that you welcome access riders/documents, and treat the information as confidential/need-to-know unless the artist says otherwise. Do not make access riders a requirement at the application stage – some

artists prefer to discuss access needs only once they have been accepted for an opportunity or piece of work. It goes without saying that access riders should never be used as a screening tool.

It is your responsibility as an organisation to ensure an artist's access needs are communicated to each member of staff that will be working directly with them.

## **Setting the Tone**

There are things that you can do within your organisation to create an inclusive and safe atmosphere for neurodivergent people.

- Consider Equalities & Diversity training in neurodiversity – especially neurodivergent-led training that talks about strengths as well as challenges.
- Name neurodiversity in your organisation's bullying/harassment policies – this lets neurodivergent people know that you will take their concerns seriously.
- In larger organisations, neurodivergent staff could be supported to start a Neurodiversity Network

This power to set the tone also extends to events and programmes that you run. If you make clear at the outset that you care about access and inclusion, it encourages other attendees to act accordingly. Pro-accessibility policies that apply to everyone help

to make neurodivergent people to not feel singled out or embarrassed. For instance, if you are holding an event, you might issue every attendee with a 'Traffic light' communication lanyard and encourage them to use it, make clear the availability of quiet spaces. Openly implementing these inclusive strategies lets neurodivergent artists know they are welcome and considered.

## **Support Workers & Personal Assistants**

Some neurodivergent artists have support workers or personal assistants, paid for through social work departments or Access to Work. What a support worker/PA does varies enormously based on the needs of the individual, but fundamentally they are there to support the artist to work at their best. They don't do the artist's job for them, but rather enable them to do their job.

### **Do:**

- Allow artists to bring their support workers to work, meetings, events etc.
- Consider them a necessary part of making your programmes/opportunities accessible and take possible extra costs into account. If you are covering the artist's expenses (e.g. travel, accommodation, lunches), you will need to do this for their support worker/PA too.

**Don't:**

- Treat them as free labour – support workers/PAs are there to enable the artist to do their job, not provide an extra pair of hands!
- Speak to the support worker/PA instead of the artist, unless the artist has specifically asked for this.
- Treat people differently for having a support worker. Artists with support workers sometimes report being infantilised as a result. Having a support worker/PA doesn't make you incapable, it just means you benefit from assistance in specific areas.

**Social Interaction**

Many neurodivergent people have challenges around social interaction, for instance:

- Difficulties interpreting social situations or responding to social cues;
- Difficulties with impulse control;
- Becoming distracted or overwhelmed by the sheer amount of sensory input or activity around us;

- Becoming easily fatigued by social interactions;
- intense anxiety in social situations.

Sometimes aspects of neurodivergent behaviour can be misinterpreted by people around us as rude or strange. This only adds to the anxiety around social interaction. For example:

- Difficulties making eye contact may be misinterpreted as rude or a sign that we are not paying attention, when actually eye contact can be painful and distracting.
- Knocking over or dropping things may be misread as carelessness or rowdiness when it is simply difficulty with motor control
- Stimming (self-soothing, repetitive movements or sounds) and tics may be interpreted as weird, and we may be pressured to suppress them
- Having trouble with conversational turn taking can be connected to poor impulse control, and demonstrate excitement and engagement rather than bad manners
- Reluctance to engage in social events may be misinterpreted as rudeness or unfriendliness, when we simply find the intensity of them too overwhelming or exhausting.

There are lots of ways to support people with social challenges:

**Do:**

- Educate staff about neurodivergence and promote understanding and acceptance. Assume good intent and remember that neurotypical behaviour can seem just as strange and mysterious to us as neurodivergent behaviour can be to you!
- Think about ways you can reduce the social burden on people who find it difficult. For instance, allow people to participate in social events on their own terms and for shorter periods, or bring a buddy or support worker.
- Remember that neurodivergent people may need more recovery time after social interaction and give them enough time and space.
- Have a mix of event sizes and formats so that people have options. For instance, some people manage better on Zoom than in person, or prefer smaller, more manageable groups, or communicate more easily whilst walking or carrying out another activity like drawing.

- Consider having a dedicated liaison for neurodivergent artists at large events
- Write down the unwritten rules! Sometimes we can be oblivious to the unspoken expectations in an environment so make sure these are clearly spelled out.
- Consider providing “traffic light badges” for all event attendees. These are coloured badges or lanyard tags that allow people to indicate whether they want to interact socially or if they would prefer to be left alone. Green means you are happy to chat with anyone; Yellow means you only want to interact with people you already know; and Red means you do not want to interact with anyone. People can change their badges during the event if they later feel able to interact more. For more information on colour communication badges, see [this document from the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network](#).

### **Don't:**

- Draw attention to stims, fidgets or tics, or ask people to try and suppress them – the stress of this can make things worse.
- Tell people to “get networked in” – social networking is difficult or impossible for some neurodivergent people. Think instead about how you could encourage and facilitate

connections on a one-to-one or remote basis.

- Require more social interaction from artists than they can handle. People can produce great work without being social butterflies!

## **Executive Functioning**

Executive function refers to the cognitive processes that allow us to manage our lives. The abilities to plan, concentrate, remember instructions, process information, make decisions, organise and keep track of things, initiate or change tasks, focus attention and regulate behaviours or emotions are all included in executive function.

Some neurodivergent people may have difficulties with aspects of executive function, either for inbuilt neurological reasons (for instance in autism, ADHD/ADD, dyspraxia, or dyslexia) or simply due to additional fatigue.

There are lots of ways to support people who struggle with aspects of executive function to do their best work.

### **Do:**

- Make sure communications and instructions are clear and explicit - e.g. what is required, what time things will start and

end, what to expect, who will be there.

- Agree clear work plans, and stick to them.
- On longer-term projects, it can be helpful to have regular check-ins to make sure everyone is on the same page and targets are being met
- Allow people extra time for processing and decision making. Some neurodivergent people may not be able to make snap decisions, or may need to talk it over with someone they trust.
- There are lots of practical strategies to stay organised - using notes, calendar reminders, and software/apps like Microsoft OneNote, MindGenius, Brain in Hand can make a big difference. Some people will also have support workers or PAs through social work or Access to Work who help them with aspects of this.
- Allow flexible working. For people with some conditions, certain times of day may be better. For instance, someone taking medication for epilepsy may be drowsier in the mornings and may prefer to work in the afternoons.
- Allow regular rest breaks of 10-15 minutes to recharge. Have a space where people can move about when they need to.

- Encourage people to keep written or audio notes (e.g. voice memos) of instructions.
- If necessary, provide guidance on prioritising tasks

**Don't:**

- Be too rigid – many people have developed their own coping strategies so if they have a system that is working for them don't insist they do things the way you've always done them.
- Spring things on people – it can be difficult to adapt to sudden changes in plans.

## **Environmental/Sensory**

The world is full of sensory stimuli that can be overwhelming and even painful for some neurodivergent people. Some people describe the feeling of sensory overload as their brain “short circuiting” when they are receiving too much competing sensory information. It can make concentration impossible, cause anxiety and irritability, and even extreme distress. If this is an issue for the artists you are working with, however, there are lots of ways to support them.

**Do:**

- Be prepared to make environmental adjustments, for instance dimming the lights or turning off background music, if these are causing discomfort or distress.
- Remember that certain types of lighting, sounds, or excessive screen use can trigger seizures in people with epilepsy. Always speak to individuals to find out what their triggers are.
- Allow people to work in quiet rooms where they can adjust the lighting.
- Allow people to use their own strategies to regulate their sensory input. For instance, using noise cancelling headphones to block out background noise.
- Give people access to quiet/chill out rooms and allow regular rest breaks. This gives people a chance to recover from overstimulation. People with Tourettes may also benefit from a quiet place to tic.
- Encourage people to take breaks and alternate tasks if something causes sensory stress. For instance, the flickering of computer screens can be overstimulating for some people, so they may need to take hourly breaks or break it up with non-screen work.

- Allow people to stim if they need to, in order to calm themselves down in a difficult sensory environment.
- make your premises easier to navigate by providing clear signage and allowing site visits so people can familiarise themselves before starting work. New places involve a lot of new sensory information and can be overwhelming.

**Don't:**

- insist on hotdesking – this is really stressful for lots of neurodivergent people
- assume that people's sensory compensations or coping strategies (e.g. stimming, moving/fidgeting, noise cancelling headphones, stepping out for breaks) mean they aren't interested or paying attention. We often need to do these things in order to better pay attention!

**Communication**

This encompasses both written and verbal communication.

Different neurodivergent people will have different challenges and preferences when it comes to communication; for instance, someone with dyslexia may struggle with emails or letters, and prefer verbal instructions, whereas an autistic person might dread

face-to-face interaction and prefer email contact. Again, remember to ask the individual.

It's also important to point out that lots of these adjustments make things easier for everyone, not just neurodivergent people!

Remember that **successful communication is a two-way street** and minimising misunderstandings is the responsibility of both sides.

This is a huge subject with lots of published literature, and this is just a short guide to some general, practical things to consider.

**Do:**

- Provide external communications and key documents in alternative formats, e.g. audio, Easy Read. Videos or Q&A events can also be a good way of getting information to people who prefer less text.
- Allow people to apply for opportunities or contact you in alternative ways, for instance voice notes or by phone.
- Make your written communications as accessible as possible. Use Plain English, think about the fonts, colours and spacing you use, and have printed documents in a selection of coloured papers. If need to get across mathematical content, use visual ways e.g. graphs and charts.

**Zoo Co Theatre** (wearzooco.co.uk) have produced a good guide to using colour to make accessible documents:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uMPc2r3HWg1d6Hxi5FwwrPqD2lCZclzX/view>

The **British Dyslexia Association** also has a style guide for making documents that are easier to read:

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide>

- Highlight key points in emails and documents so they are easier to find quickly. For instance, if you are sending an email about a meeting, you might put the time and date in bold.
- Make sure your website is accessible, e.g. compatible with screen readers.
- Allow people extra time to read and process information. This may involve waiting longer for a response than you are used to.
- When creating work plans or schedules, consider ways that information could be presented visually, for instance flow charts or diagrams rather than long paragraphs of text

- Make instructions clear and specific, both in a working environment and when designing applications. A common difficulty that neurodivergent artists have is that application forms seem vague and impenetrable. Make sure it's clear what you are asking.
- Allow and answer questions! If an artist needs clarification about something, please be willing to talk it over with them.
- In longer-term working relationships you could designate a mentor or contact person that the artist could go to for clarification.
- Understand that people have different communication requirements and allow people to contact you in different ways, e.g. phone, email, video call. What suits one person might not suit another so be flexible about ways people can get in touch.
- Remember that there are lots of different ways to communicate, not just verbally. Non-verbal autistic people or people with verbal dyspraxia, selective mutism or apraxia may use writing, interpreters, or forms of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). Communicating this way takes much longer than talking so make sure that AAC-users

are given plenty of time to process and communicate and can take breaks when they need them.

### **Don't:**

- Judge or discriminate against people for grammar and spelling – difficulty with this may be part of their condition
- Assume that because someone can't talk, they can't communicate.
- Simply swap one form of communication for another – one size does not fit all! For instance, video applications may be much easier for some artists, but impossible for others. The key is to provide options.

## **Fatigue**

Fatigue can be a big challenge for many neurodivergent people but it's rarely considered as an access issue. There can be a number of reasons for fatigue:

- Neurodivergent people are often working twice as hard – as well as doing the job in hand, we are processing large amounts of sensory input, analysing our social interactions, and trying to hide or minimise our neurodivergent traits ("masking"). All that cognitive effort is draining!

- The anxiety associated with some neurodivergent conditions such as OCD or autism can be debilitating and mentally exhausting
- Some medications, for instance for bipolar, OCD, PTSD, anxiety or epilepsy can cause fatigue and drowsiness
- Chronic sleep problems are common in people with certain neurodivergent conditions, e.g. autism, anxiety or PTSD
- Some neurodivergent people have additional disabilities which may add to their fatigue. For instance, 35% of the respondents to our artist survey had a chronic illness in addition to being neurodivergent.

What does this mean for working artists?

- Some neurodivergent artists may not be able to produce as much work as quickly as other artists. As well as the obvious financial implications, this can make it difficult to get awards, commissions or representation by galleries
- Neurodivergent artists may struggle to work a full- or part-time job and create work, meaning lots of artists are simply unable to continue as artists

- Immersive opportunities such as residencies, or projects with a heavy workload and tight timeline, can be unmanageable.

What can organisations do to support artists with fatigue?

**Do:**

- Think about how opportunities could be adapted for people with a slower pace of work. For instance, could a commission be split? Could the timeframe be extended?
- If you run a gallery, reconsider minimum work requirements. If you can't stage an entire exhibition of an artist's work, what about staging more group exhibitions where people can show smaller collections or even single pieces?
- Consider how residencies could be made less intense. For example, could a residency be split up into smaller blocks, or be made part time? This flexibility would also benefit artists with caring responsibilities.
- Allow flexible and part-time working. Shifting the work day back can enable artists to work during their "good" hours, but be aware that some artists will still not be able to put in a full 8-hour day.

- Allow home-working where possible
- Allow time for rest breaks, and make sure there is somewhere quiet available to rest.

### **Don't:**

- ask people to push through their limits – this can lead to a mental health crisis, burnout, or an [autistic meltdown or shutdown](#), or increase risk of seizures.

## **Administrative Tasks**

Administrative tasks, such as emails, social media, accounting, research, writing applications and reports are a significant part of an artist's practice and everyday life. As an ND person there are particular challenges that make these tasks a greater burden.

These challenges include -

- **Difficulties with planning, organising and prioritising** as well as starting tasks and staying on task (for some neurodivergent people who have executive functioning issues).
- **Difficulties with time-based tasks** - cognitive processing differences and fatigue can make it more difficult to work to

strict deadlines or short timeframes and we may require more time to complete tasks to the best of our ability.

- **Difficulties with Literacy and Numeracy** - conditions like dyslexia and dyscalculia can make admin tasks a struggle. Reading, writing and number-based tasks can take much longer and be more tiring than they might for someone else.

What can organisations do to support artists with administrative tasks?

**Do:**

- Acknowledge the extra burden that neurodivergent artists face when it comes to admin tasks.
- Keep application, reporting, and evaluation processes as simple as possible and offer clear guidelines on the expected length and format of reports. Consider having templates with headings that help to structure the information
- Ensure application forms and information are accessible - offer them in a variety of formats (e.g. Easy Read and audio).

- Provide clear guidance on how to fill out forms, and allow artists to ask for clarification.
- Ensure online forms are compatible with screen reader/accessibility software.
- On online application forms, allow artists to see all questions before answering (as opposed to one at a time), and to save their progress and return later.
- Consider offering guaranteed interviews for disabled artists who meet the minimum criteria for opportunities.
- Allow longer response times for emails, and offer alternatives to email for people who prefer verbal communication (e.g. phone calls, Zoom).
- Where possible offer extended deadlines and flexible working for artists who need it, and anticipate a range of working processes
- Consider offering access budgets to support artists to apply for your opportunities. [Jerwood Arts](#) is a great example of an organisation that offers access support for application-writing

- Reach out to organisations that promote and represent neurodivergent artists - make sure your opportunities are being seen!

**Don't:**

- Ask for unnecessary detail or paperwork
- Ask vague, open-ended questions in application forms - these can be difficult to interpret
- Judge people negatively in their spelling or grammar - these can be signs of dyslexia, etc.
- Ask dyslexic artists to scribe or take minutes, and generally be flexible and sensitive about how admin tasks are shared within a group.
- Don't expect people to hand-write if they are more comfortable typing or audio recording notes.

# Working Checklists

The issues above cut across various areas of work, but sometimes it can be helpful to think about support in terms of specific scenarios. Therefore, we have prepared some checklists for specific contexts. These are not exhaustive, but are a good place to start thinking about how your work can be made more accessible.

## In the Workplace

Remember - ASK the individual artist what **their individual** access requirements are. These are just general guidelines

Things to think about when supporting neurodivergent artists in a workplace setting (e.g. onsite freelancers)?

### In an office setting:

- Have accessibility software enabled on an office computer - this is important for your PAYE employees too!
- In offices where people usually hotdesk, allow people to have a fixed workspace, with noise screens or similar if necessary. In some cases a private/shared office might be appropriate
- Freelancers working in an office setting for any length of time should have a [Computer Workstation Ergonomics Assessment](#)

and the findings acted upon.

- Allow people to use noise-cancelling headphones or Do Not Disturb signs to maintain focus.
- Have assistive equipment available in the office, appropriate to the individual's needs - e.g. calculator, non-slip mat for writing, coloured overlays, digital recorder, ergonomic keyboards/mice/seating, anti-glare screen filters.
- Be flexible about dividing tasks and have other staff members take on some tasks if appropriate. E.g. using a stapler, hole punch, or printer can be difficult for people with dyspraxia so these tasks could be reassigned to another employee.

**In all work settings:**

- Ask artists if they have any access requirements.
- Agree clear work schedules – either on a daily basis or for the project.
- Adhere to those work schedules – sudden change can be difficult to process.

- Allow time for rest breaks - don't schedule meetings back to back, and always allow a full lunch hour
- Respect that some people may have maximum hours that they can work in a day/week
- Consider ways of dividing large projects - for instance, allowing people to job share, share commissions, or have flexible or shared residencies
- Allow flexible working and home working, where appropriate. E.g. if someone is drowsy in the mornings, they may benefit from shifting their working day back a few hours.
- Don't ask dyslexic people to scribe/minute or read aloud, or dyscalculic people to do number-based tasks, e.g. money-handling.
- Provide access to a quiet room or similar where people can go to rest or decompress.
- Allow people sufficient processing time. Don't demand snap decisions, and build in flexibility in timescales, where possible, to give people the time they need to read and process.
- Provide clear instructions as to work priority.

- Make sure the artist has access to written confirmation of instructions so there is no confusion later.
- Allow artists to record meetings, lectures and instructions on a voice recorder instead of taking written notes, if that is better for them.
- Allow artists to bring an advocate or support worker to meetings.
- Have the option of different coloured papers for hard copy documents (you will need to check which colour helps the individual).
- Have structured templates for any required reports or evaluation documents.
- Make reasonable adjustments for using numeric door codes, reference numbers or computer logins.
- In team working, allocate tasks according to people's strengths.
- Provide additional support for dyscalculic artists with budgeting and financial reporting

## Designing Opportunities

Neurodivergent artists have a unique perspective and artistic voice. Encourage them to apply to your opportunities by designing them with accessibility in mind.

- When designing opportunities, think about long-term career progression. Is this helping an artist to develop their practice or establish themselves, or is it just a token?
- How could your opportunity reasonably be modified to be accessible for people with support needs? For instance:

**Residencies** - do they need to be immersive/residential, or could they be 9-5 or part time, or even non-site-specific? (see for instance [An Artist Residency in Motherhood](#)).

If it needs to be site-based, could the residency be split up over a longer period?

A more flexible approach to residencies would benefit a range of artists with access needs or caring responsibilities

**Exhibition Open Calls** - does the deadline give artists enough time to apply? Short deadlines are a sure way to put off neurodivergent artists

**Commissions** - Can the timescale be flexible? If not, could the work be shared between two artists?

## Person Specifications

Certain types of criteria can indirectly disadvantage disabled and neurodivergent people.

- **Ability to drive, cycle, etc** - Many jobs specify that people must hold a UK driving license, or be able to drive, but several ND conditions (e.g. autism, learning disabilities, dyspraxia, epilepsy) can affect the ability to drive. However jobs can often be adapted for people who don't drive, and the Access to Work scheme can pay for taxis for roles where relying on public transport isn't possible.
- **Age** - Don't limit opportunities by age - lots of disabled and neurodivergent people start their careers later in life. Most opportunities that are limited to certain age groups don't need to be. If your opportunity is aimed at early-career artists, say that - don't use "under 30" or "18-25" as a shorthand.
- **Degree Status** - Don't limit opportunities to graduates - this discriminates against self-taught artists and those that haven't been able to pursue formal education. Have alternative criteria for non-graduates (e.g. years practicing). If your opportunity is aimed at early-career artists, say that - don't use "recent graduates" as a shorthand.

# Applications

## Pre-application Information

- Make sure information about the application process is offered in different formats (e.g. audio and Easy Read). A good example of an Easy Read guide to an application process is the [Royal Academy's guidance for their 2021 Summer Exhibition](#).
- Websites should adhere to accessibility standards (e.g. compatible with screen-reader or dyslexia software)
- Allow artists to ask for clarification about the application process, including the application form (using their preferred communication medium!). You might also consider holding Q&A events for artists to ask questions
- Give clear timelines so artists know what to expect, and when to expect it.
- Larger organisations should consider offering access budgets to support neurodivergent and other disabled people to apply. For instance Jerwood Arts offers a £200 access support worker budget to cover additional costs of applying for disabled applicants
- Note in the pre-app information that you invite applications from disabled/neurodivergent people - let people know they

will be welcome!

- Make sure people know that if they disclose, they will be supported, and let people know how they can request reasonable adjustments
- Advertise your opportunity in places where neurodivergent people will see it - e.g. on websites for disabled artists like Disability Arts Online, or reach out to networks of neurodivergent artists

## **Application Forms**

- Keep application forms simple and concise. Make the questions clear - don't ask artists to second-guess what they might mean
- If the application form is online, artists must be able to save their progress and resume later - not everyone can write an application in a single sitting!
- For online applications, allow artists to see the entire application form from the start, not just one question at a time. Many people need to be able to see all the questions before they start answering to be able to form answers.

- Acknowledge the receipt of applications, even if it is just an automatic email. This reassures artists that they submitted successfully.
- Consider offering guaranteed interviews or at least feedback for disabled applicants (similar to guaranteed interview commitment that [Disability Confident](#) employers make)
- Offer alternatives to written applications, i.e video or audio recorded applications.

## **Interview stage**

- Ask candidates if they have any access requirements for the interview.
- Provide candidates with a clear outline of what to expect, including timings and any tasks they will be asked to do.
- Open-ended questions can be confusing for some people. You may need to prompt or ask supplementary questions to get the information you need from the candidate
- Allow people to choose between in-person and online interviews where possible.

- For in-person interviews, provide a map, clear directions and a contact number if they get lost (conditions such as dyspraxia involve a poor sense of direction). Candidates with anxiety may benefit from visiting the site beforehand.
- For in-person interviews, think about how the space can be made more accessible - e.g. have adjustable lighting, make sure the room is quiet, have clear signage to the interview room.
- Provide candidates with the interview questions in advance, and with a written copy to refer to during the interview (for candidates that prefer verbal to written information, be able to prompt).
- Allow candidates extra time to process information and respond to questions.
- Consider forms of alternative assessment where appropriate, e.g. job shadowing
- If the interview is going to be more than 30 minutes, schedule a break.
- Let candidates know when they can expect to receive a decision.

## Meetings

There are lots of ways to help people get the most out of meetings.

- Have a meeting structure, outlined in an agenda sent out before the meeting so that people know what to expect.
- Let people know how long the meeting is expected to last, and start and end the meeting on time.
- Avoid icebreakers - they take up working memory that people may need for the rest of the meeting.
- If a meeting is expected to last more than 45 minutes, schedule a break.
- It can be difficult to know when to contribute during meetings, so use a 'hands-up' system, or make it the chair's responsibility to make sure everyone has had a chance to speak.
- The chair of the meeting should summarize points and actions before moving on to the next topic, and summarize the "asks" at the end.
- Be sensitive to the fact some people cannot take written notes, so appoint someone who can take notes/minutes and

share them with the group.

- Don't put people on the spot, and allow people to contribute in non-verbal ways if they need to - for instance, contributing opinions in advance, or communicating in writing that is then read out by the chair.

## **Events/Exhibitions**

There are lots of aspects of events or exhibitions that can be stressful for neurodivergent artists - they are often noisy, crowded, and tiring, and can be socially overwhelming. But there are lots of ways to make in-person events more accessible.

## **Workshops, Conferences, and Networking Events**

- Ask artists if they have any access requirements
- Think about the sensory environment at your event:
  - Make sure the event is located in a quiet room - it's hard to focus with a lot of background noise. If noise is unavoidable, allow people to bring ear defenders or provide them yourself
  - Think about the lighting in the room - harsh fluorescent lighting can be difficult for ND people. Be aware of flickering lights which can trigger migraines and some types of seizure.
  - Avoid strong scents and perfumes
- Make sure people know what to expect at your event, including the time of the breaks, and remain on schedule.

- Offer a range of types of event - for instance, online as well as in person, small-group as well as large-group.
- Speaking in group settings can be difficult - don't call on people who don't want to speak. You can help people who do want to speak but find it difficult to participate in conversations by using hands-up systems, so people know when it's their turn.
- Remember you can help artists to make connections without formal networking events - make introductions by email or social media!
- Especially at large events, hand out [Colour Coded/Traffic Light Communication badges](#) to all guests and encourage them to use them. This sets the tone and means neurodivergent artists who need them do not feel singled out.
- Make sure there is adequate signage so people feel confident about where they are meant to be, and can easily find the right room.
- Have a quiet room that participants can access if they need to take a break.

- At classes and workshops, schedule plenty of rest breaks - 10 minutes for every hour - and a lunch break.
- If there is a task or activity, keep the instructions visible throughout so that people don't need to rely on working memory to know what they are supposed to be doing.
- Keep instructions brief, and stick to 1-2 tasks at a time
- Talks should have closed-captions (and for d/Deaf or hard of hearing people, BSL interpretation).

## **Staging Exhibitions**

Many of the points above apply to exhibitions too, but there are also some considerations that are more specific to exhibitions:

- Allow couriering of work, as some neurodivergent artists may not physically be able to get to a gallery for installation due to fatigue, anxiety, etc.
- There are lots of barriers during installation, e.g. standing for long periods, moving heavy work, needing to make lots of decisions, and needing to concentrate for long hours. Allow longer for the install, and make arrangements for technicians

to assist artists with areas they find difficult. Make sure seating is available for people to rest when they need it.

- There are a number of numerical tasks involved with installations, so make sure artists who need it have access to calculator, pen and paper when arithmetic might be required e.g. measuring space and arranging work within it. For important calculations, have a system of double checking. Consider having a prepared template for important measurements to help with organising the information.
- Relaxed openings can be better for artists who find crowds difficult. Rather than holding a busy Private View on the first night of the exhibition, a relaxed opening allows people to drop in and out over the course of a day, spreading visitors out.
- Make sure exhibition information is available in different formats, e.g. large print, Easy Read, on coloured backgrounds etc.

## Online Meetings/Events

Online events are often thought of as universally accessible, however that's not the case for everyone. Here are some ways you can make online meetings and events more accessible for ND artists.

- Invite people to let you know their access needs in advance of the event, by including a line in marketing or booking confirmation emails to the effect of "Please contact us with any access requirements and we will be happy to help".
- Let people know in advance if there will be loud or sudden noises or music, and practice the tech beforehand so sound doesn't accidentally blare out louder than expected. Don't use flashing images in presentations.
- For smaller meetings or events, offer practice calls to let people get used to using the videoconferencing platform.
- Set up the meeting default to participant cameras off, participant mics off. This allows people to opt in to the level of engagement they feel comfortable with.
- Let people know in advance the length and structure of the meeting or event, and if there will be breaks. For meetings,

make sure the agenda is provided in advance.

- Introduce the hosts and guests and explain their role in the event.
- Ask people to mute when they are not speaking - the host should be responsible for policing this and can mute people remotely. Background sound is very challenging for many ND people.
- Allow people to have their cameras off. Not everyone is comfortable on camera.
- Explain any meeting features you will be using - e.g. chat, Q&A, breakout rooms.
- Allow people to contribute via the chat option as well as verbally.
- In some cases, it may be more appropriate to use the Q&A function rather than Chat in Zoom - the chat interferes with some captioning programs, and screenreaders read out every comment so makes it very difficult for blind/partially sighted attendees. These access conflicts are why it's very important to find out people's access needs in advance, so they can be planned for.

- Ask people to use the 'Hands up' function if they want to speak - this helps quieter people get a word in.
- It's good to have 3 people leading the event - one to facilitate/present, one to manage the technical side, and one to monitor the chat for questions and who has their hands up. At intervals, the chat monitor should read out the written contributions on the group's behalf, and call people with their hands up to speak.
- If someone is presenting, remember to Spotlight them to minimise distraction.
- Remind attendees there are things they can do to their own settings to minimise distraction or overload, e.g. speaker view can help some people, and there is an option to hide self view in most platforms.
- Consider live captioning - this can be helpful for people with auditory processing issues. Human-written captions more accurate, but are also AI options like Otter AI (<https://blog.otter.ai/zoom-captions/>)
- Allow people enough processing time - don't put people on the spot to answer. It is also helpful to record meetings and let people watch them again, and allow people to follow up by

email if something occurs to them later.

- Schedule breaks - at least every 45 minutes, but more often if required.
- Sum up the key points of the meeting or event at the end.
- Explain what to expect after the event - e.g. will there be a follow-up email? Will the recording be available?
- Applause can be noisy and distressing, so consider encouraging people to show appreciation with [‘flapplause’](#) - waving the hands silently (this originates in Deaf clapping).

## **Studio/fabrication environments**

- Provide contact information for disabled artists to discuss any access needs.
- Presume competence - ask about people's needs, not their disability.
- Have quieter times/single person spaces available to disabled artists at the same cost as busy/shared ones. Have specific quieter sessions for artists that need them.
- In addition to in-person inductions, have written instructions available for people who retain written information better. Make sure there's a quick reference guide for all tools
- Make sure ear protectors are provided.
- Have chairs or stools for people to sit down - long periods of standing can be difficult for people with fatigue.
- Some physical workshop tasks can be difficult for people with motor control issues, so make sure there is someone available to assist.
- When demonstrating a new tool for a dyspraxic artist, it can be helpful to have them stand behind you when showing the task so they can see it from the correct perspective and know

which side of the body to use (ask the individual artist what they prefer, however).

## **Travel**

Ask the artist to outline any access needs related to travel in an access document or rider. These are some issues to consider when arranging travel for artists

## **General**

- Discuss proposed modes of transport with the artists. Not everyone will be able to use all forms of transport. Some ND people may not be able to use public transport, for instance, and may need a taxi.
- Some ND people are not able to drive but may have funding for taxis from Access to Work - this should not be a reason to exclude them from jobs where taxis are an acceptable alternative to a private vehicle.
- Give artists clear directions, well in advance, and provide a contact number for help on the day.
- Minimise travel for those who find it difficult - could this meeting or event take place online?

## **Hours of travel**

- Check if artists have a maximum number of hours they can travel in a day
- Check if artists need to travel at particular times of the day - e.g. some artists will not be able to travel first thing in the morning, or will need to travel outside of rush hour times.

## **Recovery time**

- Some artists may need long journeys to be scheduled on separate days to work, and/or for recovery time to be scheduled after travel. Check with individual artists what recovery time they need before commencing work.

## **Support Workers/PAs/Travel Buddies**

- Some artists will need to travel with support workers, personal assistants or travel buddies - all projects should have some budget set aside to cover their travel and accommodation.
- Be aware that support workers/PAs need to be booked well in advance so give artists as much notice as possible (preferably at least 2 weeks).

- Be aware that it may not always be possible to book a support worker/PA for the required date or time, and be flexible.

## **During the journey**

- Some artists may need specific seats or areas booked (e.g. quiet coach or forward-facing seat on trains, fixed seat or aisle seat on aeroplanes, etc.)
- Some artists may need priority boarding on aeroplanes - discuss with individuals.
- You may need to book special assistance when booking artists' travel - this needs to be done as far in advance as possible, but usually at least 48 hours before. Some transport providers allow you to do this while booking the actual travel ticket, but others require you to contact them separately after booking.
- Artists may need extra luggage/not be able to travel cabin-baggage only on aeroplanes if they need to bring extra equipment, food, medication etc.

- Check with artists for dietary requirements before booking meals

## **Accommodation**

- Some artists will have specific accommodation needs, e.g. private room, private bathroom, accommodation for support worker/PA, a quiet room, etc.

## **Intersecting needs**

- Access can intersect with cultural needs (e.g. Jewish artists may not be able to travel on Shabbat) so double check these before booking.
- Many ND artists also have physical disabilities, and some ND conditions are actually associated with particular physical conditions (e.g. gut conditions or EDS), so be aware of this possibility.

## **List of useful resources:**

## **Accessibility Resources**

### **How to Put on An Accessible Exhibition - Shape Arts**

<https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/accessible-curating>

### **An Accessible Arts Marketing Guide - Shape Arts**

<https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/accessible-marketing-guide>

### **British Dyslexia Association Style Guide (2018)**

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide>

### **Making better conditions for Neurodivergent freelancers - An open letter to Arts Organisations/venues** by Vijay Patel and Rachael Young for the Freelance Task Force

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LxDgdY3Ed9qQWqWggRDnWmPDjoIWtak8es2RhnjqvjY/edit?usp=sharing>

### **Access to Work: A Guide for the Arts and Cultural Sector -**

Disability Arts Online

<https://disabilityarts.online/atw/>

### **Zoo Co Theatre**

<https://www.wearezooco.co.uk/>

Zoo Co have created a number of accessibility documents that organisations may find helpful, including:

[Considering Colours - Creating Visually Accessible work for people with ASD.pdf](#)

[Access Coordinator- Zoo Co Role Breakdown.pdf](#)

**Every Brain** - a Manchester-based project to increase neurodiversity in the arts

<https://www.everybrain.co.uk/>

**Neurodiversity at Work** - ACAS Guidance

<https://archive.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity>

**Paying Artists**

A campaign to secure fair payment for artists exhibiting in publicly-funded galleries, with resources for setting fair pay rates

<http://www.payingartists.org.uk/>

**Scottish Artists Union Rates of Pay**

[https://www.artistsunion.scot/pay\\_rates\\_2021](https://www.artistsunion.scot/pay_rates_2021)

**Access Docs for Artists**, by Leah Clements, Alice Hattrick and Lizzy Rose

<https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/>

**Access Rider Open Template**, by Alexandrina Hemsley

<http://alexandrinahemsley.com/resources/access-rider-open-template/>

## **Individual Conditions in the Workplace**

**Autism in the Workplace** - a TUC report by Janine Booth

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Autism.pdf>

**Dyslexia in the Workplace** - a TUC guide by Brian Hagan

[https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Dyslexia\\_In\\_The\\_Workplace\\_2013\\_LR.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Dyslexia_In_The_Workplace_2013_LR.pdf)

**Dyspraxia in the Workplace: a Hidden Asset** - Dyspraxia

Foundation Guide for Employers

[https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Employer\\_guide\\_to\\_dyspraxia\\_1.0.pdf](https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Employer_guide_to_dyspraxia_1.0.pdf)

**Epilepsy in the Workplace** - a TUC guide by Kathy Bairstow

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/EpilepsyInTheWorkplace.pdf>

**Tourettes Syndrome: Information for Employers** - Tourettes

Action

<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/84-employers.html>

**Employer's Guide to Bipolar** - Bipolar UK

<https://www.bipolaruk.org/faqs/leaflet-employers-guide-to-bipolar>

## **Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Dysgraphia Line Manager**

**Toolkit** - UK Civil Service

This is a guide for line managers in the civil service, but contains useful information relevant to many working environments

<https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2020/03/Dyslexia-Dyspraxia-Dyscalculia-and-Dysgraphia-Line-Manager-Toolkit.pdf>

## **PTSD UK Information for Employers**

<https://www.p1tsduk.org/friends-family/information-for-employers/>

## **Links to Organisations for Specific Conditions**

### **ADD/ADHD**

ADHD Foundation - <https://adhdfoundation.org.uk>

Scottish ADHD Coalition - <https://www.scottishadhdcoalition.org>

ADHD Aware - <https://adhdaware.org.uk>

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety UK - <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk>

### **Autism/Aspergers/Autism Spectrum Conditions**

National Autistic Society - <https://www.autism.org.uk>

Scottish Women's Autism Network - <https://swanscotland.org>

Scottish Autism - <https://www.scottishautism.org>

### **Bipolar Disorder**

Bipolar UK - <https://www.bipolaruk.org>

Bipolar Scotland - <https://www.bipolarscotland.org.uk>

### **C/PTSD**

PTSD UK - <https://www.ptsduk.org>

Trauma Council - <https://uktraumacouncil.org/trauma/complex-trauma>

## **Dyscalculia**

Dyslexia Scotland - What is Dyscalculia? -

<https://dyslexiascotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/library/ds-leaflets/Dyscalculia.pdf>

The Dyscalculia Information Centre - <https://www.dyscalculia.me.uk>

## **Dysgraphia**

The Dyslexia Association - Dysgraphia -

<https://www.dyslexia.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Definition-of-Dysgraphia-1.pdf>

## **Dyslexia**

British Dyslexia Association - <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>

The Dyslexia Association - <https://www.dyslexia.uk.net>

Dyslexia Scotland - <https://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk>

Made By Dyslexia - <https://www.madebydyslexia.org>

## **Dyspraxia**

The Dyspraxia Foundation - <https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk>

Movement Matters - <http://www.movementmattersuk.org>

## **Epilepsy**

Epilepsy Action - <https://www.epilepsy.org.uk>

Epilepsy Scotland - <https://www.epilepsyscotland.org.uk>

## **FND (Functional Neurological Disorder)**

FND Action - <https://www.fndaction.org.uk>

## **Learning Disabilities**

CHANGE - <https://www.changepeople.org>

People First - <https://peoplefirstscotland.org>

## **Mental Health Conditions (various)**

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk>

See Me: <https://www.seemescotland.org>

## **Selective Mutism**

SMIRA (Selective Mutism Information and Research Association) -  
<http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk>

## **Tourettes**

Tourettes Action - <https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk>

Tourette Scotland - <https://www.tourettescotland.org>

# Glossary

## **Neurodiversity**

The idea that brain differences - e.g. autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia etc. - are a normal part of human diversity, rather than disorders or deficits.

## **Neurodivergent**

People whose brain functions differently from the way that society deems “normal” are referred to as **neurodivergent** (i.e. our brains **diverge** from the typical type).

## **Neurotypical**

People whose brain functions in the way that society deems “normal” are referred to as neurotypical.

## **Neurotype**

One particular type of brain. The human population is made up of a diversity of neurotypes.

## **Access Document/Access Rider**

A document that outlines a person’s access needs. This can be given to employers, venues, commissioning organisations etc. to ensure they are able to support a disabled person appropriately.

## **Social Model of Disability**

A way of looking at disability as a social construct. The Social Model posits that it's the barriers erected by a prejudiced society that are truly disabling, rather than impairments or differences themselves. The foundational idea of the Disability Rights Movement.

## **AAC**

Augmentative and Alternative Communication. This includes all forms of non-speech communication, such as writing, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), Voice Output devices, and sign (Makaton or BSL).

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